

## Oscar buzz and betting

Here we are again, Oscar season. It is one of the biggest events in the entertainment world and one of the oldest. The Academy Awards started out 82 years ago in Hollywood, and with little ceremony. There was a simple dinner reception with almost 300 guests, each of whom had paid \$5 for their ticket. There was no surprise as the winners received their awards because the results had already been announced 3 months earlier to the press. The awards have evidently changed greatly over the years, and many could argue that spectacle has become the real purpose of the Oscars.

It is a very sought-after award in the entertainment world, though not necessarily one of the most prestigious. But **it means big bucks** at the box office for those who win, because people will go to see the winning films. It also means a lot of money for gamblers as they try to predict which film is going to pick up the big awards on the night. There are many websites where you can go to play a “predict the Oscars” game. If you search the Internet, you’ll find that there are **a host of** websites offering useful advice on how to assess the nominees and pick the most likely candidate to win. Not only is there a lot of advice available from **keen** amateurs, there is also advice from academics. Researchers from UCLA have provided a set of criteria for choosing those most likely to win.

The study shows that Oscar nominations and Academy Award winners do not depend on a performer's talent alone. Other factors, such as the subject matter of the film and how many films are shown, are important when trying to predict Academy Award nominations and eventually the winners. Researchers Gabriel Rossman and Nicole Esparza analysed the Internet Movie Database to predict Academy Award nominations. They looked at all the Oscar-eligible films from 1927 to 2005 to forecast future Oscar winners. They found that the three most important things to consider are serious subject matter, the number of films in the year, and the performer's gender.

The most important of these three factors is serious subject matter; the researchers found that actors who are in serious films or dramas are 800% more likely to win an Oscar than those in comedies. It is not surprising that they also found that if there are fewer films in a given year, there is less competition and that everybody's chances increase. Surprisingly, however, they found that actresses are twice as likely to be nominated for an Oscar as actors. Put simply, there are fewer actresses in films, but the same number of awards for both actors and actresses. Therefore, there are fewer women to choose from when nominating performances for an award.

“It’s surprising how many variables other than a performer’s talent play a role in determining who gets nominated,” said the report’s lead author, Nicole Esparza. “A performer’s odds of being nominated are largely set before the cameras

even start **rolling**, back when the script was bought, the director was signed, and the film was cast.” Other ways to predict the awards such as past film credits offer further evidence that the quality of the film itself has little to do with its likelihood of winning an award. The more nominations an actor has received in previous films, the more likely they are to be nominated in the future. Furthermore, if an actor performs in a film with previous Oscar winners, their chances of being nominated increase. However, though they are more likely to win an award, it’s unlikely to be as a lead performer.

“Conventional wisdom holds that it’s not what you do but who you know,” Esparza said. “And Hollywood may be no different, except when it comes to Academy Award nominations. Surprisingly, who you know doesn’t make or break you at nomination time.”

Whether these criteria will stay apply this year is difficult to say. This year’s revamping of the ceremony is aimed at making the ceremony less conventional than it has been in recent years. Instead of the normal 4 nominations for best film, this year’s awards included 10 films to be considered for the category. Moreover, the voting process has been altered. Previously, the Academy’s members (of whom there are more than 6, 000) were sent copies of all the films that had been nominated, and then chose their favourite for each category. It is not compulsory for the members to vote and they do not have to see all the films that are up for awards. This year, members were asked to rank the films nominated for best film. The votes were then tallied, and the film with the most points was given the award. Many people believe this is why the much smaller and relatively little seen film, *The Hurt Locker*, walked away with the award this year.

But something tells me, that despite all the criteria that the researchers considered, essentially, the awards come down to **pot luck** and something special in the air.

## Exercises

Mark the following sentences as either **true**, **false** or **doesn't say**.

1. The Academy Awards were intended to entertain the public.
2. Genre is the biggest influence in the Oscars.
3. Directors are not a considering factor when trying to predict an award winning performance.
4. Actors who are in films with previous Oscar winners have a better chance of winning a supporting role than a leading role.
5. Connections are likely to increase your chances of winning an Oscar.
6. Academy members have to vote for the Best Film.
7. Before this year, members of the Academy Award only chose one film for the Best Film award.

Read through the article again. Match the phrases highlighted in the text with the correct definition.

- a host of...
- keen
- to mean big bucks
- pot luck
- to roll

\_\_\_\_\_ : very interested, eager or wanting (to do) something very much

\_\_\_\_\_ : anything that is available or is found by chance, rather than something chosen, planned or prepared

\_\_\_\_\_ : to film

\_\_\_\_\_ : a large number of something

\_\_\_\_\_ : a large amount of money will be produced

## Answers

Mark the following sentences as either **true**, **false** or **doesn't say**.

1. The Academy Awards were intended to entertain the public. **False**
2. Genre is the biggest influence in the Oscars. **True**
3. Directors are not a considering factor when trying to predict an award winning performance. **Doesn't say**
4. Actors who are in films with previous Oscar winners have a better chance of winning a supporting role than a leading role. **True**
5. Connections are likely to increase your chances of winning an Oscar. **False**
6. Academy members have to vote for the Best Film. **Doesn't say**
7. Before this year, members of the Academy Award only chose one film for the Best Film award. **True**

Read through the article again. Match the phrases highlighted in the text with the correct definition.

**keen:** very interested, eager or wanting (to do) something very much

**pot luck:** anything that is available or is found by chance, rather than something chosen, planned or prepared

**to roll:** to film

**a host of...:** a large number of something

**to mean big bucks:** a large amount of money will be produced (a buck is a colloquial word for a dollar)